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POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN TEACHER-STUDENT CONVERSATIONS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Politeness is a universal phenomenon which serves as a means of avoiding conflict and promoting smooth communication among interlocutors in the face of complex interactions in the society. This paper therefore examines how politeness operates within the university milieu amongst interlocutors composed of teachers and students. A total of thirty oral discourses were selected between the interlocutors from various strategic locations in the University of Ilorin. Leaning on Brown and Levinson's Face-threatening acts, Leech's politeness principle maxims and Thomas's politeness strategies, the thirty identified conversations were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively to reveal amongst other findings, that face-threatening acts, which underlie impoliteness are frequently used in the conversations. The asymmetric relationships between the interlocutors result in the frequent use of these face-threatening acts, mainly bald on record which is mostly used by the lecturers towards the students. The paper concludes that the increase in the upholding of politeness principle maxims by both interlocutors, especially the lecturers will go a long way to enhance smooth interactions and maintenance of harmonious relationships among discourse participants. In addition, the appreciation of individual self-worth in the university

environment will be significantly enhanced if these politeness principle maxims are upheld.

Key terms: *Politeness principles, Politeness strategies, Power relationship, University of Ilorin*

Introduction

Communication is the major use for which man employs language. He uses language to communicate his socio-cultural experiences, aspirations, wants, needs, and so on. The yearning of man to maintain respect and personal space between himself and others, and avoid discord (maintain politeness) is one of the many ways in which peaceful coexistence can be achieved in a functional society. In fact, man's communicative competence is not only measured by his ability to interpret or understand words in isolation, but by his knowledge of context and his ability to maintain harmonious relationship with others through his use of language.

As human beings who employ language for communicative purposes, politeness is pervasive in our interactions because of the intricacies of our diversities in terms of age, status, rank, etc. (Babatunde &Adedimeji, 2008, p. 94). Without being polite in interactions, the chances of achieving success in communication are slim. Thus, Cruse (2000, p. 362) asserts that the purpose of politeness is to maintain harmonious and smooth relations in the face of necessity to convey belittling messages. This conforms to the view of Thomas (1995, p. 60) that politeness is the means employed to show awareness of another person's face where face means the public self-image of a person, without which communication may fail. Politeness is therefore a means to avoid conflict and promote smooth communication between interlocutors, especially among staff and student of a university.

A university environment is a stratum of the society and communication abounds in all its spheres amongst and

between students, lecturers, non-academic staff, etc. The transmission of morality and knowledge is the main aim of a university, and this is mostly done through interactions between students and lecturers, who are the principal actors in a university system. In such interactions, language is used to uphold the face wants and (or) flout the face wants of either the lecturers or the students. In other words, face want is maintained or weakened which preserves or inhibits the actualisation of politeness.

Politeness has been traditionally studied on the basis of ordinary conversation. However, recent studies have drawn attention to its role within the workplace and academic environment as exemplified in the works of Odebunmi (2002, 2009) and Babatunde and Adedimeji (2008). This study is thus inspired by this trend. This work examines the conversations that have been observed over time between the principal interlocutors composed of lecturers and students, by identifying the presence of elements of politeness to show how it operates in the university environment. The paper also aims to examine the politeness markers and the face -threatening acts (FTAs) used in the conversations in relation to how social variables, such as social distance and power relations have effect on the interlocutors' language use.

Related Literature

Politeness Phenomena

Politeness, an offshoot of Pragmatics that accounts for how people operate in social and linguistic discourse, has gained momentous attention from notable linguists over the years. Lakoff (1973) has been widely acclaimed as providing pioneering work on politeness. Lakoff's, pioneering ideas have been further developed by other notable linguists, who have elucidated on the concept. For instance,Leech (1983) sees politeness as a form of behaviour that establishes and maintains comity. In other words, politeness is the ability of

participants in a social interaction to communicate in a situation of relative harmony. To Lakoff (1975, p.53) to be polite is saying the socially correct thing. Yule (1996, p.60) argues that politeness could be treated as a fixed concept, polite social behaviour or etiquette within a culture. Similarly, Holmes (2009, p. 711) argues that politeness is a strategic interaction aimed at achieving goals such as avoiding conflicts and maintaining harmonious relationship with others. This view echoes Adegbija (1989, p.58) position that politeness is associated with situations in which one speaks or behaves in a way that is socially acceptable and pleasant to the hearer Thus, there is a common theme of politeness as a socially appropriate behaviour which runs through these definitions.

Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle and Maxims

According to Leech (1983), politeness is located within the domain of interpersonal rhetorics. That is, the focus is on the speaker's goal rather than his or her illocutionary goal. In other words, it deals with how interlocutors make use of language to communicate with others, express feelings and attitude. Leech (p.131) defines politeness as a phenomenon concerning a relationship between two participants (which he labels 'self / the speaker and 'other' / the hearer). Leech introduces the politeness principle which states:

"Minimise (other things being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs; maximise (other things being equal) the expression of polite beliefs." (p. 81). The polite and impolite beliefs are understood beliefs, which are 'favourable' and 'unfavourable' respectively, to the hearer of a third party.

Leech (p.132) identifies six sub maxims which show how politeness operates in a conversational exchange. These maxims are linked to the illocutionary acts that they mostly occur in. They are: maxims of tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, sympathy and agreement towards others. The

observance of these maxims varies within cultures (Leech, 1983, Thomas, 1995) and they conflict, at times. When these maxims conflict, the importance or values attached to each maxims in respective cultures determine which one will supersede.

In addition, Leech (p.141) observes that politeness may manifest the way conversation is managed not just in the content of conversation. If silence or interruptions occur at the wrong time, it may be deemed as impolite. Thus, silence must be managed to avoid having impolite implications. As a result of this, Leech (1983) proposed another maxim of politeness from Malinowski (1930) phatic communion to be, phatic maxim which has the sub-maxims: (a) Avoid silence (b) Keep talking (p.141). Phatic maxim also aims to extend common ground of agreement and experience shared by the participants (Leech p.142). This is due to the fact that issues discussed in order to avoid silence are usually not controversial to the interlocutors rather they share the same attitude to these issues.

Politeness and the Management of Face

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) proposed the concept of politeness as a redressive action, taken to counterbalance the disruptive effect of face threatening acts (Kasper 1990, p. 194). The basic model of their notion is 'face' a term adopted from the work Goffman (1967). According to Goffman (p.31), face is "pieced together from the expressive implications of the full flow of events in an undertaking". Grundy (2008, p. 195), avers that face is a property that all human beings have, and that's broadly comparable to self-esteem. This suggests that face is assigned during interaction; it is the "public self-image" that every member (of a society) wants to claim for himself. Face consists of two related aspects, the positive and the negative face. An individual positive face is reflected in his or her desire to be liked, approved of and appreciated by others, while an individual's negative face is reflected in the desire not to be

impeded or prevented from having the freedom to act as one chooses (Thomas, 1995, p.169). Both positive and negative face needs of participants are constantly under threat by various acts or omissions of other participants (Salifu 2010, p. 278). Face is therefore highly valued; it can be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must be constantly adhered to in interaction.

Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)

Brown and Levinson (1978, p. 65), state that certain illocutionary acts are liable to damage or threaten another person's face. Such acts are known as face-threatening acts (FTAs). They also assert that speakers can also threaten their own face by their words in conversations. In relation to Leech's (1983) scales for assessing the degree of politeness, Brown and Levinson (1987) propose that the weightiness of an act is established by the additive value of three independent variables: the social distance between the speaker and hearer, the relative power between them, and the degree of imposition of the act. The assumption behind this formula is that, there is a linear relationship between the seriousness of an FTA and the values assigned to each of the above variables, that is, the higher the value (for example, more distance between the interlocutors or higher degree of imposition), the morepolite the strategy.

Strategies for Performing Face Threatening Acts

Citing Brown and Levinson (1978), Thomas (1995, p. 169) gives four possibilities which determine if the speaker decides to perform the FTAs or not. These strategies are: performing an FTA without any redress (Bald on record), performing an FTA with redress (Positive politeness), performing an FTA with redress (Negative politeness) and performing an FTA using off record strategies The bald on record strategy does nothing to minimise threat to the hearers 'face'. It indicates that one can directly address the other without regard to his or her face as a means of expressing one's needs. The positive politeness

strategy shows that you recognise that your hearer has a desire to be respected. It also confirms that the relationship is friendly and expresses group reciprocity. Thus, solidarity is being expressed. Negative politeness strategy, like positive politeness strategy, also recognises the hearer's face; it also recognises that you are in some very way imposing on them. Mitigating devices such as 'please', 'would you,' etc. (which serve to soften the demand) may be used. The off record indirect strategies are not directly addressed to the other. The main purpose of the use of this strategies, is taking the pressure off from the other. The strategies avoid the direct face threatening act of requesting for something. Some strategies for performing off-record politeness include: giving hints, using metaphors, ambiguity or vagueness. Brown and Levinson (1978) cited in Thomas (1995, p. 169) further give a final strategy which states, 'Do not perform FTA' There a lot to say about saying nothing. This suggests that there are times when something is potentially so face- threatening, without saying anything.

Politeness and Power Relation

A great deal of what we communicate is determined by our social relationships. In other words linguistic communication is necessarily a social interaction. Politeness can be accomplished in terms of social distance or closeness/solidarity (Yule, 1996, p. 60). Salifu (2010, p. 279), also admits that 'power' reflects relative superior status, social distance, unfamiliarity, and deference. Thus, power commands respect and formality. 'Power' and its counterpart 'solidarity' also play a crucial role in Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness theory. The two authorities demonstrate that the collective effects of three variables: power, distance (which corresponds to solidarity) and ranked threat of face- threatening act predict the level of politeness required in a particular context. In addition to Brown and Levinson's four main types of politeness strategies, Thomas (1995) postulates other politeness strategies exhibited in social relations as: register, deference,

ambivalence and indirectness.

Despite the overwhelming importance of Leech's theory t linguistic enquiry particularly in the aspect of politene phenomena, it has been faced with various criticisms. Th theory has been criticised for not accounting for situational an cultural contexts which invariably affect the direction of an conversation. He has also been criticised for referring to some speech acts (e.g. directives, declaratives) as being inherentl rude, while other acts (e.g. Commissives) as being inherentl polite. His equation of politeness with indirectness has also received several criticisms. Brown and Levinson's theory as a classic in the field of politeness theory has not been left out with a number of criticisms one of which is the subject of universality. Researchers Matsumoto (1989), Gu (1990), Nwoye (1992) and Spencer-Oatey (2008) have been cited by Hsieh (2009) as being 'anti-universality of face theory' and have strongly suggested that Brown and Levinson's 'universality' is only applicable to the western world because it has been noted that their theory is only based on three languages: English, Tamil and Tzeltal (Holmes 2009, p.712). Contrary to this submission, Nwoye (2006) cited in Grundy (2008, p.207) posits that:

...Of course we couldn't expect identical computations of appropriate politeness formulas across cultures any more than we would across varying situations in a single culture. Just as we employ different strategies to get different people to do things for us, so asking for assistance when, for example, your car breaks down will impose to different degrees in different societies.

This suggests that what is owed depends on the calculation of what is expected in each social and situational context that it arises. Spencer-Oatey (2000, p.3) also affirms that Brown and Levinson's politeness theory has not been able to properly

account for the fact that people do not always aim at maintaining harmonious relationships, but might deliberately want to attack rather than support their interlocutor. In spite of these criticisms, Brown and Levinson theory inform one of the most commonly discussed and applied theories of politeness and has been observed to have solved questions related to the complexities in human interaction. It is in the light of this, we choose to adopt both models for a productive analysis. As Odebunmi (2009, p.3) rightly puts, "the question of face want is vital in human interaction...".

Methodology

The paper is carried out through a close study of thirty randomly selected fragments of conversations of lecturers and students (postgraduate and undergraduate students) in the University of Ilorin. The conversations were recorded and later transcribed into written form and then applicable chunks were extracted from each conversational token for the researcher's use. The data were sourced from classrooms, lecturers' offices, school cafeterias, boardrooms, telephone conversations' settings and other strategic locations where conversations between the interlocutors often occur. Brown and Levinson's model of politeness and Geoffery Leech's politeness maxims were applied to the data. Politeness strategies namely: ambivalence, deference, and register postulated by Thomas (1995) were also incorporated for the data analysis. It is through these varying selections that we present how language is manipulated to change or maintain relationships.

Data Analysis

The data analysis is presented via quantitative and qualitative means. Tables are used for the quantitative analysis. Each of these tables presents the number of occurrences and equivalent percentages of each tool used in the analysis of the data, which makes up the discussion and findings. For the qualitative analysis, five sample extracts (data) representing one-sixth of

the total data in the table is presented and subsequently explained.

Quantitative Analysis

Face-Threatening Acts

Table1. Presentation of Figures and Percentages of Face-threatening Acts in the Conversations

Interlocutor	FTA 1 Freq / %	FTA 2 Freq / %	FTA 3 Freq / %	FTA 4 Freq / %	NFT A Freq / %	Tota l Freq / %
Lecture r	13 /86.58 %	4 / 67 %	4 / 36.36 %	3 /100 %	0 / 0 %	24 / 26.66 %
Studen t	2 / 13.32 %	2 / 33 %	7 / 63.63 %	0 / 0 %	1 /100 %	12 / 33.33 %
Tota l	15 / 100 %	6 / 100 %	11 / 100 %	3 / 100 %	1 / 100 %	36 / 100 %

KEY: FTA1- Bald on record, FTA2-Positive politeness, FTA3-Negative politeness, FTA4- FTA using off record strategies, NFTA- No FTA

Politeness Principle Maxims

Table2. Presentation of Figures and Percentages of Politeness Maxims in the Conversations

Interlocutor	Tac t Freq / %	Generosit Freq/ %	Approbatio Freq / %	Modesty Freq / %	Agreemen Freq/ %	Sympath Freq/ %	Tota l Freq /%
Lecture r	3 / 60 %	1 / 33.3 %	1 / 50 %	0 / 0 %	0 / 0 %	1 / 50 %	6 / 37.5%
Studen t	2/ 40 %	2 / 66.6 %	1 / 50 %	3 / 10 0	1 / 100 %	1/ 50 %	10 / 62.5%
Tota l	5/100 %	3 / 100 %	2 / 100 %	3 / 100%	1 /100 %	2 /100 %	16 / 100%

Politeness Strategies

Table 3: presentation of Figures and percentages of Politeness strategies in the conversations

Interlocutor s	Ambivalenc e Freq / %	Deferenc e Freq / %	Registe r Freq / %	Tota l Freq / %
Lecture r	1 / 100 %	0 / 0 %	0 / 0 %	1 / 3.23 %
Studen t	0 / 0 %	29 / 100 %	1 / 100 %	30 / 96.9 %
Tota l	1 / 100 %	29 / 100 %	1 / 100 %	31 / 100 %

Qualitative analysis

The politeness strategies identified in each of the entire data are indicated in the transcripts of conversations under the appendix section while five sample extracts which represent one-sixth of the total analysed data in the tables above, are explained followed by the discussion and findings.

Conversation 1

Conversational event (A lecture room: Some students who were late plead to be allowed inside the class room. Hence, the lecturer asked the students that were already in the class room thus:

Lecturer: Should we allow them in?

Students: Yes sir.

FTA

FTA with Redressive Action (Positive Politeness)

The lecturer's utterance is a face-saving act tending towards positive politeness. He avoids the potentially face- threatening act of making use of his authority to outrightly dismiss them from attending the class, but rather asks the rest of the students in the class if the students should be allowed in. His use of 'we' in this utterance is an indication of the positive politeness marker 'seek agreement'. He employs agreement by identifying with his hearers and soliciting their approval as a mark of solidarity and shared common goal without exhibiting superiority or authority.

Politeness Strategy

Deference

The honorific 'sir' in the students' response is a politeness strategy used as a form of respect accorded the lecturer. However, in the context of the speech event, it is used to mitigate the imposition on the lecturer so as to have their aim achieved.

PP Maxims

Sympathy Maxim

From the students' response to the lecturer's question, they maximize sympathy between self and other as it is obvious that they were touched and affected by the plight of their colleagues. The context of the speech event also necessitated their unified and outspoken response considering their large number which they saw as an opportunity to utilize. The response would have been contrary if the lecturer only had a student as an interlocutor.

Approbation Maxim

The lecturer in his utterance maximizes his beliefs by expressing his approval of other (the students). He makes the students feel good by his suggestion which necessitates their response; thus, creating room for solidarity.

Conversation 4

Conversational event (A lecturer's office: a student knocks and enters the office shared by three lecturers two of which are absent. The following conversation ensued between the student and the lecturer present :)

Student: Good morning, ma, I am looking for that mummy that sits on that chair.

Lecturer: There is no mummy that sits on that chair, when you know whom who you are looking for, you call back.

FTAs

FTA without Redressive Action (Bald on record)

It is evident that the student does not know the lecturer and lacks the courtesy of enquiring considering the context in which the utterance is being uttered, her use of "mummy" to address the absent lecturer is considered inappropriate. The respondent that is, the lecturer understands this, thus her face-

threatening response. Her response can be shocking as well as embarrassing to the hearer (student) which will inform or correct the student to get things right or learn how to address superiors as well as request from superiors appropriately. The lecturer's utterance is an indication of wanting to control the behavior of the hearer through words.

Negative Politeness

The student is being indirect her utterance. She knows the implication of requesting directly. She makes her request to the lecturer to appear like a statement. Thus, she uses the tact of "be indirect" to indirectly request from her addressee (the lecturer) the whereabouts of the absent lecturer she seeks.

Politeness Strategies

Deference

The honorific "ma" used alongside the greeting in the student's utterance to the lecturer is a mark of respect accorded to the lecturer in preparation or to soften the imposition to what is to come next. The inappropriate address form is also used by the student as a form of respect to the absent lecturer whom she seeks.

Register

The student makes an unscrupulous and inappropriate use of the address form, 'mummy'. Although, a form of politeness which is informed by the cultural context or 'Nigerianess' it is however not suitable for the context by which it is used.

Conversation 12

Conversational event: (A lecture theatre: a lecture is ongoing, the following conversation ensued between the lecturer and a student:)

Lecturer: Give us a brief summary of what has just been discussed.

Student: ..em..em.. I have no idea, ma.

Lecturer: You are unserious, what type of silly response is that? (Now addressing the rest of the students in the class) you all have a lackadaisical attitude to your studies (now facing the student again). If you continue this way, you will just fail.

FTAs
FTA with Redressive Action (Bald on record)
The lecturer's initial utterance and later response poses threats to the student's positive and negative face wants. Utterance one indicates a request in form of an order and utterance two exhibits disapproval towards the student's response.

Negative politeness
The students uses the tact of hedging 'em,..em' to presume he will be imposing on the lecturer in his inability to give a suitable response to what has been demanded from him.

Politeness strategy
Deference
The honorific 'ma' is used by the student to accord respect to the lecturer.

Conversation 16
Conversational event (A lecture room, a test in progress)
Lecturer (Addressing the students) You are to answer all the questions, no whispering or side talks; anyone found wanting would be sent out and scored zero. Is that understood?
Students: Yes, Ma!

FTA
FTA with Redressive Action (Bald on record)
The lecturer's utterance is a threat to the students' negative face, as there is no attempt to mitigate the imposition on the students. Her utterance depicts order and threat towards the students.

Politeness Strategies
Ambivalence
In the lecture's utterance we identify the statement '...anyone found wanting will be sent out and scored zero'. The statement is naturally offensive. But the impersonal 'anyone' makes it possible for the students to decide whether whispering or talking during a test which amounts to a drastic punishment is morally justified or not. It is in the light of this that, the students can opt for whether the threat is directed at them or not.

Deference
The honorific 'ma' is identified in the students' utterance to mark respect to the lecturer and also in affirmation to their cooperation.

Conversation 28
Conversational event (A friendly conversation between a female lecturer and a female student in the lecturer's office)
Lecturer: Your bag is lovely.
Student: (Blushes) Thank you, ma but it is kind of old.

FTAs
FTA with Redressive Action (Positive Politeness)
The student uses the tact of 'give complement' to minimize the threat to the hearer. Although, thanking the lecturer is a way of showing appreciation but the student still goes ahead to dismantle the lecturer's positive face by implying that the lecturer does not know what is in vogue or an amateur in the knowledge of accessories.

Politeness Strategy
Deference
'The honorific 'ma' is once again used by the student in her utterance to accord respect to the lecturer.

PP Maxim

Modesty maxim

The student both minimizes praise of self and maximiz dispraise of self in her response. She is being modest as she do not want to feel pompous towards the lecturer acknowledgement.

Discussion and Findings

Face-Threatening acts

The number of FTA strategies in the conversations records a total of thirty-six (36) with the lecturers' utterances carrying a higher percentage of 66.66%, while the students' utterances record a lower percentage of 33.33%. FTA1, that is, bald on record, records the highest number of instances of FTA strategies made by the lecturers, by thirteen (13) counts. The speakers' linguistic behaviour, that is, the lecturers exhibit his/her person. It suggests higher status and position of power; this is in conformity with Thomas' (1995) assertion that when power differential is great, FTA is not mitigated regardless of imposition rating. Yule (1996) also confirms that bald on record makes the speaker assume power over the hearer, and the speaker wants to control the behaviour of the hearer through words. Conversations twelve (12), twenty-two (22), thirty (30) amongst others are examples of this strategy used by the lecturers. Relatively low to the observed instances of FTA1 in the lecturers' utterances is that of the 2 (two) instances of bald record in the students' utterances. Examples of these instances in the conversations are; student reporting an authority; conversation eight (8) and face threat associated with ignorance; conversation twenty-two (22).

Table 1 shows percentages of thirty-three percent (33%) and sixty-seven percent (67%) of FTA2 by the students and lecturers respectively. The higher percentage shown by the lecturers indicates that despite the relative power, higher status and social distance they have over the students, they (the lecturers)

sometimes, employ amicable devices to allow a harmonious interaction. Conversations one (1), seventeen (17), twenty-six (26), twenty-eight (28), are examples. In FTA3 that is negative politeness, the students have the higher count of seven (7) equivalents to sixty-three point sixty-three percent(63.63%) while the lecturers' utterances records four (4) counts making a total of eleven(11) counts. The reason for the higher occurrence discerned in the students' utterances are that the students have to mitigate the imposition on the lecturers, using various tacts of negative politeness strategies such as apology, hedging, admitting infringement and begging for forgiveness to present their requests; so as not to appear impolite towards the lecturers considering the social distance in their relationship. The lower count of FTA3 by the lecturers indicates that they often opt for bald on record and only adopt FTA3 when they decide to.

The students' utterances record zero percent (0%) of FTA 4 that is, FTA using off record indirect strategies, while the lecturers' utterances records three (3) counts. Sometimes, the lecturers go off record so as to avoid the potential threat their utterances may pose to the students which leaves the power relationship between the interlocutors rather implicit. 'No FTA' carries the lowest number of counts of FTAs used in the conversations by the interlocutors. The students' utterances record (one) 1 instance of ambivalence while the lecturers' utterances record none.

PP Maxims

A total of sixteen (16) uses of politeness principle maxims are observed in the conversations which is lower in count to that of the total record of FTAs in the conversations. The Tact maxim displays a high sense of politeness technicality considering the highest frequency of occurrence of the politeness maxims. It carries a total of five (5) counts with the lecturer's utterances recording sixty percent (60%) and the students' recording forty

percent (40%).

Contrary to the tact maxim, the generosity maxim employed by the students' record a higher number of instances than the lecturers. This is due to the fact that the students sometimes feel indebted to the lecturers. With the students recording counts of two (2) while the lecturers record just one count. In the approbation maxim, the lecturers and students both carry equal percentage of occurrences recording fifty percent (50%) each. In the modesty maxim, we discern three (3) instances employed by the students, while the lecturers' utterances did not record any instance. Similarly, there are no instances of the agreement maxim in the lecturers' utterances but the students' utterances indicate just one count. The sympathy maxim records equal counts of one (1) respectively, by the interlocutors, an equivalent of fifty per cent (50%) each, making it a total of two (2) counts.

Politeness Strategies

Thirty one (31) politeness strategies are identified in table 3. The deference marker carries the highest number of politeness marker recording twenty-nine (29) counts which are employed only by the students as no instance is recorded by the lecturers. Its occurrence spreads through the conversations by the students with varying use of honorifics, titles and address forms towards the lecturers who assume power and higher status over them. Its consistency is in tandem with Thomas (1995) view that the use of deference is a mark of respect by other people by virtue of their higher status, greater age.

This paper has been able to confirm that culture plays a vital role in lecturer/student interaction in the research area. The Nigerian socio-cultural environment is another pivotal factor where it is paramount that we accord respect to our elders. The students display respect towards the lecturers who are their elders. However, there are instances where subordinate

(students) are older than their superiors (students). The status of the lecturers thus comes to play where the students see the lecturers as mentors, who guide teach and convey knowledge to them. The constant use of honorific expressions and titles as a mark of respect towards the lecturers informs the 'Nigerianness' in them even when they are not politeness in its honest form.

In addition, the deference markers used by the students sometimes do not represent actual politeness depending on the various context of speech occurrences, they are often times used to mitigate the imposition on the lecturer, or not to disfavour the speaker that is, the lecturers in wanting the interactions to continue.

Register and ambivalence record just one count and are employed by the two interlocutors in the conversations. The low count of register use indicates that the interlocutors are aware of the code choice of the academic context and also choose not to infringe on the knowledge of this in their exchanges. The issue of cultural factor inherent in politeness is also exhibited in a student's register use in one of the conversations; (datum (4) four) where in her attempt to be polite, her cultural background is reflected in her misuse of terms. Also, the zero percent (0%) record of ambivalence by the students suggests that, they avoid employing it so as not to show impoliteness. The lecturers' low count is just for choice in relation to the context of use.

From the ongoing discussion, it is evident that each of the interlocutors' utterances in the conversations exhibits one politeness feature or the other with their varying sub-tacts. However, it can be discerned that there is an unequal display of politeness strategies and other politeness tools used by both interlocutors in the conversations FTA strategies mostly inherent in the lecturers' utterances carry the higher counts than the politeness principle maxims as the students'

utterances exhibit higher counts of the maxims. In essence, impoliteness runs through the conversations than politeness. This reveals how language is used by the lecturers to display power and status quo in the university environment. They have the power and authority to be critical and not having to worry mostly about the face wants of the students. Fairclough'(1989, pp. 9-11) assertion corroborates this: "...individuals are not usually free to manipulate language to achieve goals nor have equal control in interaction because they are constrained by social conventions such as the inequalities of power..."

Conclusion

The concept of politeness remains an integral part of human interaction which aims at a harmonious relationship and peaceful co-existence between interlocutors. However, this paper has been able to demonstrate that the intricacies relating to politeness is usually endangered by the asymmetric relationship between participants. As it is observed from the analysis, FTAs which underlie impoliteness are mostly used by the superior towards the subordinates to exercise power and status quo, which is often times necessitated by the context of speech situation (that is, the university environment) where it is perceived that such enactment is deemed fit. It is thus recommended that when the politeness principle maxims are increasingly upheld by both interlocutors, especially the higher-placed speakers, the hearers' face is saved, social disharmony is prevented, and the hearers, mainly the students, can go about their intended purpose in the university without occurrences of fear or intimidation.

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